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THE DECLINING SELF-CONFIDENCE OF THE SUPER-POWERS

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STATINTL

YOU may remember that when Flora Poste, in *Cold Comfort Farm*, was summoning up strength to deal with her Aunt Ada Doom, she read again and again in the *Higher Common Sense* of the Abbé Fausse-Maigre 'the chapter on "Preparing the Mind for the Twin Invasion by Prudence and Daring in Dealing with Substances not Included in the Outline"'. I only wish that, in dealing with our subject, I too could have read the *Higher Common Sense* of the Abbé Fausse-Maigre. For I feel very much like a Mannerist painter, the traditional frame of whose canvas cannot contain his whole picture. True, all the old elements of reality are still there, and as vigorous as ever. His art is still fundamentally figurative in the old way, but here a form is absurdly elongated, there a familiar face has an unnatural pallor and, above all, the extremities of limbs spill out of the canvas altogether. Many small things, in other words, are quite new, and their importance cannot be estimated.

Some of these 'substances not included in the outline' make it much more doubtful whether an imperial Power can any longer mobilise its own people and resources for imperial purposes. Nationalism, certainly, remains very strong indeed, stronger for instance than Communism. We cannot doubt that nations will still fight for their independence and territorial integrity, even for the liberation of 'irredentas' on their borders. But what about putting our troops in Berlin, Saigon, Prague or Singapore, where nationalism is only indirectly involved? For how long in this permissive and cynical age will any people have the moral self-confidence to do such things?

Self-confidence is the key. An imperialist government has to feel a great historic righteousness about what it does, and the citizens of its core nationality must share much of this feeling. There must of course be adequate numbers of people, and an adequately productive economy; but the will to mobilise, and the willingness to be mobilised, are far more important, and since men are moral beings that will rests upon self-righteousness.

Now it is obvious that this self-righteousness and this will have fallen in Britain to levels so low that we have become almost quite unusable for imperial purposes. What I ask you to consider is how far the U.S. and Soviet peoples have gone along the same road. For the old-fashioned cold war between the two old-fashioned super-Powers is still the most important international tension; indeed most of the other tensions concern us British not directly but only in so far as they concern these two.

Having married a U.S. citizen, and being a professor, I am often in the United States, and all my work contacts—though perhaps only half of my social contacts—are with students and professors. From this unrepresentative viewpoint, which is also far too much the viewpoint of the journalists we read, the situation is very frightening indeed. A large and growing number of young and educated people have found an answer to William James' desperate question, can there be a moral substitute for war? Their answer is civil war. The aggressive energies of this country are turning inwards. The slogans, the demonstrations, even the haircuts, are not only perceived by the old as acts of aggression; they are intended to be just that.

So, naturally, external war has been rejected. One-half at least of the young men in the better universities, or, say, at least 10 per cent. of those of military age, go to great lengths to dodge conscription and

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